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ABSTRACT

The widely held idea that interracial proximity provides acceptance of the other race was tested in the case of black undergraduates who, the study found, showed less acceptance as their contact with white teachers increased. An explanation for the discrepancy between this finding and that of earlier studies is that in other studies the emphasis has been on over-structured interview methods that produced misleading defenses in the respondents. The findings of this investigation suggest that an informal approach is helpful. Further, in considering the needs of black colleges, the disadvantages as well as the advantages of white teachers must be acknowledged. (Author/JS)

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THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATING WHITE FACULTY MEMBERS INTO A PREDOMINANTLY NEGRO COLLEGE

August 1967

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Tuskegee Institute

Tuskegee Institute, Alabama

Introduction

Based on preliminary research and literature in the field of race relations, it was hypothesized that the White instructor is more fully accepted by his Negro students during their Junior and Senior years than he is during their Freshman and Sophomore years. The problem of acceptance appeared to be an important one since there were indications that an absence of it impinged on and interfered with the teaching and learning process. At the outset, it was assumed that any teaching situation involves a certain amount of conflict between teacher and student, so that it was necessary during this investigation to isolate purely racial impediments to the relationship (this was mainly accomplished by using the relationship between Negro teacher and student as a base-line). In this connection, another problem to be explored was based in part on the hypothesis that the classroom ideal is achieved when the superordinate position of teacher and subordinate position of student is eliminated; the question, then, was whether this ideal would be unattainable when his race provides the White teacher with an additional dimension of superordinance that, it was hypothesized, he would try to overcome by maximizing his occupation and minimizing his race.

Method

Data-gathering mainly resulted from the work of participant-observers. Students were screened to select those that appeared most appropriate for the work. They were then given a kind of on the job training. Informal guidelines for their investigations were developed; to a large extent they evolved from the work of the students themselves. The guidelines became progressively more systematic, but continued to be open-ended.

Results

There was no increase of acceptance by upper-classmen of the White faculty. On the contrary, whenever there was a perceptible difference between upper and lower classmen, it was in the direction of growing unacceptance. The increased unacceptance involved a wider range of grievances that covered every aspect of the classroom situation: the reasons for the White teacher being there; his methods of teaching and grading. The appraisals reflected a growing conviction that the White teacher was working against the interests of the students. In other words, the superordinance of the teacher was progressively compounded by the superordinance of his race.

Discussion

The principle explanation for the findings which contravene what had been established by our prior research and related literature is in the methods used. Both our pilot study and other social psychological investigations have relied on a highly structured approach that seems to have missed much of the dynamics involved. The use of participant-observers, who were members of the community being studied, has provided the means of seeing past many of the defenses that normally arise in response to a formal study and particularly when involved with one that touches on such a value-laden area. In addition, it is not possible, as some have suggested, to select findings from the White community (e.g., studies showing how to increase the White's acceptance of Negroes) and assume they will apply to the Negro community.

Conclusions

On a procedural level, it appears that clear limitations exist where studies are undertaken with methods that impose artificiality of the research site.

On a substantive level, another kind of caution is required. Although White faculty members who are teaching at Negro colleges are usually better trained in a formal sense than Negroes teaching there, more is required for being an effective teacher in these institutions. It does not appear that the credentials of White teachers are necessarily enough to offset the problems arising from their teaching.

Summary

The widely accepted idea that interracial proximity provides acceptance of the other race was tested in the case of Negro undergraduates who, it turned out, showed less acceptance as their contact with White teachers increased. An explanation for the discrepancy between this finding and that of earlier studies, is that in other studies the emphasis has been on overly-structured interview methods that produced misleading defenses in the respondents. The result suggests that in such situations, an informal approach is helpful. Further, in considering the needs of Negro colleges, the disadvantages as well as the advantages of Whites teaching there must be taken into account.